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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 002284

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND DRL: S.JOSEPH
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER
CJTF-HOA AND USCENTCOM FOR POLAD

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: CUD LEADERS FREED FROM PRISON

REF: ADDIS ABABA 02245 AND PREVIOUS

ADDIS ABAB 00002284 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: ACTING POL-ECON COUNSELOR: SEAN CELY.
REASON 1.4 (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On July 20, the 38 Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) leaders, CUD members and journalists that had been convicted on charges including "Outrages Against the Constitution," were granted a Presidential pardon and released from prison. The release is a result of months of negotiations by the Ethiopian Elders to secure agreement from both the GoE and the (formerly) incarcerated leaders on the conditions of their release. A signed statement of regret by the detainees and subsequent sentencing on July 16 paved the way for the Ethiopian Pardon Board to grant amnesty. In the morning of July 20, PM Meles announced on national radio that the 38 convicted political prisoners were now free on unconditional pardon. Moments later the leaders were put in buses and taken to their homes by the prison administration. An additional 33 who have signed the same petition as these 38 now await their release. Post continues to work with the Elders to push the GoE to release these prisoners immediately. END SUMMARY.

CUD LEADERS ARE FINALLY HOME!

12. (SBU) A dramatic week that began with 30 of the 38 convicted detainees receiving life sentences, followed immediately by an announcement of pardon consideration, ended with all 38 being bused back home to their families. On July 19 the Ethiopian Pardon Board finished reviewing the pardon applications for these 38 detainees in an unprecedented three days (rather than the customary three months), working day and night to complete their work. The President signed, and on July 20, PM Meles announced on national media that the GoE had granted the released prisoners unconditional release)-that their criminal record was wiped clean and that they would be allowed to run again for election during the upcoming bi-election for their vacant seats in Parliament and temporarily filled place in the Addis Ababa City Council. (NOTE: These elections are currently scheduled to be held concurrently with the local election sometime between December 2007 and February 2008. The exact date is yet to be announced. END NOTE.) A short time later, for the last time,

prison officials loaded up these 38 on buses. Rather than taking them to the court house, as was routine for the last year-and-a-half, they were being shuttled to their individual homes. Poloff spoke with the families of CUD leaders Hailu Shawel, Berhanu Nega, Mesfin Woldemariam and Yacob Hailemariam, who all reported that they have already arrived home and are surrounded by friends and family.

13. (SBU) Following this announcement, the Ethiopian Elders held a press conference to announce the release and to, for the first time, publicly explain their efforts. In a room filled wall-to-wall with diplomatic representatives, local and international press, the group of 18 Elders read a statement thanking the GoE and calling on all Ethiopians to support the spirit of reconciliation. They also profusely thanked diplomatic missions and governments around the world that supported their work. However, a significant portion of their statement focused on the "negative influence of a few outsiders, in both the EU and the U.S.," who have, "trampled on the dignity of Ethiopians." Professor Ephraim went so far as to say Ethiopia had been treated as a "colonial state" and a "banana republic." He continued by saying that relations with the U.S. Congress had become like a "boxing match." Much of the pressure brought by the individuals had brought more harm than good, but thanks to the local diplomatic community, this effect had been mostly neutralized, he said. In the question and answer session, many of the questions focused on rumors heard around Addis Ababa that the USG was playing a positive role in the negotiations, whereas the EU was hampering efforts. The Elders diffused this craftily, saying that support internationally came from many different countries.

COMMENT: RELEASE OF 38 LEADERS MONUMENTAL, BUT FOCUS MUST
REMAIN ON THOSE STILL DETAINED

ADDIS ABAB 00002284 002.2 OF 002

14. (C) The release of the 38 CUD leaders, CUD members and journalists is a tremendous success and a historic day for Ethiopia. Negotiating an acceptable solution to this political crisis and securing the release of the detainees could not have been possible without the endless and untiring work of the Elders. However, Post remains fully engaged with the Elders and focused on the remaining CUD detainees. Post is urging the Elders to immediately follow this success by affecting the release of the remaining 33 detainees who have signed the letter of regret, as well as those individuals who have been detained throughout Ethiopia. Post is hoping for release of the 33 in coming days, with the others to follow.
END COMMENT.
YAMAMOTO